

Herders in the shortgrass country are eager to find new means of making a living. School teaching and schoolbus driving, plus pumping oil wells and guiding hunters, are barely returning enough to support the sheep and cattle business.

Goat ranches are making money. Tenders of redheaded African Boers bank plenty of dough selling kids for the Islamic trade. However, the distant counterpart of Boer goats, the *espanoles* or Spanish goats, cash a big coin, too. One of my neighbors shipped 140 of the cold bloods to the same sale in which I sold 120 cheater mouth ewes. His collection of cull nannies, bad mouths, spoiled bags, and a sprinkling of kids bought over a thousand dollars more than my sheep.

Spanish goats also live off the land. Rust from the top barb on a fenceline provides all the mineral requirements needed. Kidding nannies can winter on four coffee cans of corn a month. Property lines mean nothing to Spanish goats. Pasture rotation can be automatic. Doesn't bother the whole flock at all to walk cattleguards to better grass, or slip through a hole in the fence behind a white tailed deer to a neighbor's pasture being deferred under a strict government program.

Being law-abiding citizens put us out of the goat business to the count of two. When working illegal aliens became a crime and shooting at eagles a more serious crime, we not only didn't need kid goats to feed the unpapered aliens, the eagles ate the crop before we had a chance to tally, or mark the increase. The new laws also changed our national and international policy. No longer were the Border Patrol or the wet Mexicans friendly. I didn't have the opportunity to meet a federal game warden, but I didn't figure meeting one would be like having an inside with the referee of a May Day dance over at Barnhart.

After the legalizing of eagles, down south of us toward I-10, the federals mounted propane cannons to frighten the eagles back into Mexico. Fellows working on the ranch reported the first volley flushed the eagles. By the second barrage, the eagles reformed and continued swooping in after the kid goats. Part of the flight moved onto our south side in the spring, where goat scalps still hung in the catclaw bushes from the old days. I suppose the raptors killed a few fawns. I know they nabbed some ground squirrels, as I wrote about seeing a young eagle nail a squirrel on the feed ground.

However, can't all of us be schoolteachers or bus drivers. Pumping jobs and guiding hunters are becoming more

competitive every winter, too. Best opportunity I've had was the last time I bought new hearing aids. The audiologist offered to give a gift certificate for \$25 worth of hearing aid batteries for every prospect I sent her for a free hearing test.

Way back after college, I sold burial insurance. Had no idea of ever going back to being a salesman, but figured collecting a \$25 gift certificate for tax-free merchandise made selling old ewes and packer cows seem like smoking a cigarillo in Tampa Florida in the days of hand-rolled cigars.

Twenty minutes away from the audiologist's deal, I sat down at a table at the Country Club among five gents, four in dire need of audio support or a special course in lip reading. Right nifty hostess came for the drink order. Noticed for the first time that her voice carried better than mine. I could say, for example, "The club will be closed next Tuesday for a golf tournament. We will have to eat downtown." Not a flicker of response rose from the table. She repeated my announcement in *sotto voce*. Forks dropped, eyes became alert, and the whole table nodded ascent.

Before they resumed eating, I tried announcing the free hearing test offer. Selling burial insurance door-to-

door in the lower income district of Austin was a tough dodge, but addressing those hammerheads was like practicing a speech on the stone figures of Mt. Rushmore.

At lunch, I contacted the audiologist. Asked her what she prescribed for Selective Attention Deficiency (SAD) expressed in deafness. Told her if she had a remedy, I had four, maybe five cases needing treatment. Also, to forget our deal, because the only way to contact my prospects was to take on a partner too young to work for hearing aid batteries.

I am going to buy batteries one pack at a time in case I score. Hadn't thought of him in a long time, but if the old boy working on the propane cannon range is still around, he's sure to need audio support. Not worth a special trip, but he might come by some day...